

# VA Health Care Network News



Fall 2001/Winter 2002

## *Network Begins Hep C Outreach Former Miss America Agrees to be Spokeswoman*

The VA Healthcare Network Upstate New York partnered with Veterans Aimed Toward Awareness (VATA), a not-for-profit veterans advocacy group, to educate veterans and their families about hepatitis C and type 2 diabetes. The event, held to encourage New York State veterans to get screened for these diseases was a great success. Held at Kodak's Theatre on the Ridge in Rochester, 361 people were screened. Heather French, veterans advocate and Miss America 2000 spoke several times throughout the event. In a continuous effort to promote preventative health care, VA offers a variety of free screening initiatives.

Hepatitis C, an infection that usually causes no serious or disabling symptoms for many years can lead to chronic infections, increasing the risk of liver disease, failure and cancer. The VA is a leader in the diagnosis and treatment of hepatitis C and has physician experts trained in the diagnosis and treatment of the disease.

Type 2 diabetes is a metabolic disorder. People with type 2 diabetes cannot properly process sugar through their digestive system. Similar to hepatitis C, symptoms of type 2 diabetes may be hidden and slow to show symptoms.



*Rose Terry, Patient Advocate, Rochester Outpatient Clinic, draws blood at Hep C event.*

People with hepatitis C are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes.

As part of a VA-wide initiative, additional community screening events will be scheduled throughout the Network.

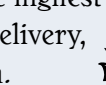
## **Network 2 Boasts New Mission and Vision**

### **Mission**

To care for our veterans with compassion and excellence.

### **Vision**

To be the health care provider of choice, achieving the highest quality in health care delivery, education and research.



## *Network 2 Wins VA's Highest Award*

Network 2 has been selected to receive the 2001 Robert W. Carey Award for organizational effectiveness and performance. The Carey Award is the most prestigious award given by the Department of Veterans Affairs. Competitors include VA medical centers and networks across the country, as well as Veterans Benefits and the National Cemetery Administration.

The Carey Award is based upon significant improvements in quality and patient satisfaction at all of our medical centers and outpatient clinics. This honor is a tribute to our workforce of more than 5,000 dedicated staff who have made this possible.

Congratulations to all for your dedication and commitment on behalf of our veterans.



## NETWORK AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Network 2 received the "VHA Best of the Web." Award. The Veterans Health Administration Office of Information Web Solutions staff selected this year's winner based on the following criteria: look and feel, dynamic/interactive nature of the site, depth of content, and apparent level of commitment by local management to support the Web site. **Kim Nazi** and **Jeff Grandon** received the award.

The **Network 2 Partnership Council** has received the 2001 Management Cooperation Award for "Most Innovative Relationship" from the Society of Federal Labor Relations Professionals.

At the Office of Public Affairs national conference, a number of public relations awards were announced. **Linda Blumenstock**, Albany VA was recognized for her outstanding media coverage of the Golden Age Games participants from the Albany area.

**Charlie Mathews** an Albany VA employee was recognized for 45 years of service.



The Virtual Learning Center (VLC) recently won the Government Technology Leadership Award presented by Government Executive magazine and the 2001 KM Reality Award given by KM World. The Office of Special Projects extends congratulations to the users of the Virtual Learning Center. The contributions of VA employees across the nation are instrumental in making the VLC an award winning Web site. We hope that you will continue to share your innovations, ideas, and lessons learned on the Virtual Learning Center: <http://vawww.va.gov/vlc.htm>

The VA Western New York Healthcare System, the University of Buffalo, and Roswell Park Cancer Institute of Health were awarded a \$2 million dollar grant from the National Institutes of Health to perform research aimed at developing vaccines to prevent ear infections in children and respiratory tract infections in adults with chronic lung disease. **Dr. Timothy Murphy**, Buffalo VA Medical Center, and professor of Medicine and Microbiology at UB is the director of the program.



### MCCF Goal is met!

The goal for FY01 was **\$18,091,000.00**. As of September 30, 2001 we surpassed our goal for the first time in four years and collected \$18.5 million. This years MCCF Goal is \$19.9 million. Management Systems came in \$101,571 under budget.

## FAREWELL & NEW APPOINTMENTS

Farewell to **Clyde Parkis**, Director, Stratton VA Medical Center, who has been selected as the new Network 10 Director, VA Healthcare System Ohio. He has been the Director at the Stratton VA since 1999.



**Doug Erickson** is the new Chief Operating Officer for Behavioral VA Health Care (BVAC).

**Fran Peters** is the Network's Veterans Service Center Manager.



**William Feeley** and **Ro Hurley** are the Chair and Co-Chairpersons for the Customer Service Council.

**David Wood** and **Colleen Combs** are the Chair and Co-Chairpersons for the Network 2 Partnership Council.



## SECURITY AND SAFETY AN UTMOST CONCERN



Safety at our medical centers has always been an important concern. But in the aftermath of the events that have occurred both nationally and here in our own Network, employee safety has become the utmost concern.

Not since the bombing of Pearl Harbor in World War II has our nation seen such tragedy as the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the downing of a plane in Pennsylvania. Closer to home at the Buffalo VA, a patient attacked employees

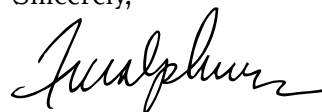
and volunteers. With the help of quick-acting individuals, all who were injured have since recovered.

All of these incidents highlight the need for heightened security and additional safety precautions. And we, the VA, are responding. As part of the Department of Veterans Affairs continuing national efforts to improve safety, VA police officers are being trained to carry firearms. In Network 2, we have been rolling-out the VA's new safety initiative.

As a Network, we are also taking extra security precautions to ensure our patients, employees, and volunteers are safe. Some of our medical centers have reduced the number of entrances to their facilities, traffic is being monitored more closely, employees and volunteers must wear ID badges and vehicles must be registered. Employees are being asked to be watchful and report any suspicious activity and/or people.

The VA, like the rest of the nation, will be proactive and vigilant in our actions and observance of safety to insure that patients, employees and volunteers are safe in our medical centers.

Sincerely,



Fred L. Malphurs  
Network Director

## VA Day of Caring

*A special thank you to all the employees who donated to the VA Day of Caring on October 3rd. The Stratton VA raised \$393, Bath raised \$287, Batavia raised \$87, Buffalo raised \$904, Canandaigua raised \$714.51, Syracuse raised \$1,630, and the Regional Office in Buffalo raised \$610.*

## Security and Safety of Utmost Concern

The VA is committed to safety and recognizes that firearms on VA police demands special responsibility and care. Consequently, VA is meticulous in its training program and evaluates each site for readiness before the officers are armed. A representative of the Office of Security and Law Enforcement conducts a pre-arming site visit to evaluate the facility plan to arm its officers. Once a site has been approved for arming, 40 hours of firearms training is provided and Security and Law Enforcement certifies each officer prior to being armed. Following this initial training, each officer must continue his/her training on use of force, handgun retention and reduced-light firing. They also must qualify on the range twice a year.

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Intranet: <http://vawww.visn2.med.va.gov/>  
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## CUSTOMER SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS

### Quality and Safety Conference

The new VHA mission statement, *Recognized Leader in Quality Health Care*, was unveiled at the National Quality and Safety Conference. For the first time, the conference brought together quality and safety professionals to establish a relationship for providing quality care and patient safety.

VHA was lauded for the tracking of customer service indicators and patient safety reporting practices. Presenters discussed the importance of using data to tell a story, identify trends, and solve systematic problems. Deputy Under Secretary for Health Dr. Frances Murphy presented ideas for exceeding patients' expectations and "delighting" veterans with our services.

Network 2 sent sixteen employees to the conference - three of whom presented poster presentations on quality and safety initiatives in the network. Quality and Safety Conference presentations, posters, and other coverage is linked from the Network 2 Patient Safety website: [vaww.visn2.med.va.gov/vitalsigns/patientsafety.html](http://vaww.visn2.med.va.gov/vitalsigns/patientsafety.html)

### Providing Excellence in Health Care Quality



Charles P. Green (patient), Pat Cain (Admin. Support Clerk, Patient Advocate area)



Edward T. Greck (patient), Reginald Hill (Nurses Aid, Eye Clinic)

#### Notes from Conference Speakers

- VA is a "Care Dealership"
- Our job is not to fill beds but to keep people out of them
- Employees must treat each other well before we can treat patients well
- Beware of "Managerial Malpractice": those who never touch a patient still affect care

Dr. Irwin Rubin, Consultant

- When you think of VA, do you think of world class quality?
- Data tells a story: in just two years, 3,914 veteran lives have been saved by tracking pneumonia vaccination rates
- Think globally, act locally

Dr. Jonathan Perlin, VHA Chief Quality & Performance Officer

- People don't come to work to hurt somebody or make a mistake
- Don't ask: Whose fault? Ask: What happened?
- No process is 100% right. Design systems that anticipate mistakes and allow for backup

Dr. James Bagian, Director, National Center for Patient Safety

## EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

### Certified Coders

The Network is proud to announce that a number of employees have taken and passed the national exam to become a credentialed coder. Ninety percent of the Network's coders are now certified.

Congratulations to: **Donna Filler** - Syracuse, **Joy Gordner** - Canandaigua, **Bernice Laffin** - Albany, **Nancy LeRoy** - Syracuse, **Victoria Hayes** - Albany, **Lynn Nobes** - Albany, **Sandra Robinson** - Bath, **Jennifer Rollins** - Albany, **Rhonda Rose** - Albany, **Mary Shippey** - Albany, **Joanne Stevers** - Canandaigua, **Carole Thomas** - Syracuse.





## GOALSHARING

### One VA Frontline Leadership Class Graduates

The One VA Frontline Leadership Skills training program graduated 15 participants in September. The training program, designed to support frontline leaders began in March and included 92 hours of "classes" (23 sessions) held at the Western New York Health Care System (VAWNYHS) at Buffalo's Learning Academy. Instructor, **Harry Ray** said, "This is the second year we have held this program for VBA and VHA employees across our Network. The class participants interacted well

and learned from each other. We are already making plans to provide the class again next year."

The following is a list of Network 2 VA employee graduates:  
**Michael Freeman**, Canandaigua  
**Sandra Jeziorski**, VAWNYHS  
**Bonnie Lerman**, Bath  
**Terry McMahan**, VAWNYHS  
**Daniel O'Brien-Mazza**, Syracuse  
**Kevin O'Hagan**, Canandaigua  
**Rhonda Poole**, Canandaigua  
**Kathy Smythe**, VAWNYHS  
**Donna Walser**, VAWNYHS  
 Congratulations!



### Women's Wellness Seminars - Innovation and Success

At the beginning of the year, the VA Western New York Health Care System (VAWNYHS) Women's Wellness Center team embarked on a "Better Health Care for all Americans" goalsharing project. The goal was to implement four women's health issue lectures in fiscal year 2001. The goals included: educating consumers, marketing the VAWNYHS, recruiting new patients, promoting VAWNYHS visibility and community involvement, enhance VAWNYHS as a center of excellence.

There have been seven lectures with topics such as pre-

menstrual syndrome, domestic violence, osteoporosis, women and depression, and eating disorders. Over 300 staff, patients and community agencies have attended these free lectures.

Although the team achieved their "gold" with the first four lectures, they continue to plan additional seminars. Team member, **Lany Mankowski** says, "We have accomplished

our goal without adding staffing or funding. Our team has had so much fun developing our programs that we do not want to stop."



VAWNYHS Women's Wellness Center Goalsharing Project 2001 Lecture Series. Staff include (front row): Dr. Lisa Nichols, Gynecologist; Lany Mankowski, WWC Administrative Coordinator; Diane Brent, Special Team Assistant; (back row) Gloria Morton, Program Assistant; Faith Hoffman, Women Veteran's Program Manager. Missing from photo: Diane Brent, Incentive Therapy.



## HAPPENINGS FROM AROUND THE NETWORK

### WW II Minority Veterans Honored



*An honoree receives a boutonniere before the awards ceremony.*

The OnCenter in downtown Syracuse was the site of this historic event - held to honor living World War II minority veterans from the Syracuse area. In total, 88 minority veterans were honored before the 600 attendees. The "Day of Honor" dinner/awards ceremony recognized minority veterans (Native American, Latino American, African American, Asian Pacific American) for their contributions to the Allied WW II victory. Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Anthony J. Principi and Congressman James T. Walsh, 25th District, New York, were the keynote speakers. Each honored veteran received an award with a personal inscription.

Odie Freeman, Chairman, Network Minority Veterans Committee was the event coordinator. His committee worked diligently with veterans groups, County/State veteran service agencies, religious/community agencies (NAACP, Spanish Action League, Onondaga

after the war ended minority veterans were intentionally omitted from history textbooks.

The Day of Honor event raised awareness for WW II minority veterans and their hardships. It provided the VA an opportunity to publicly recognize these veterans for their service to our country.

Nation, Oneida Nation, Mohawk Nation) and regional media to organize the event and identify the honorees.

The idea to hold this event came as a result of a joint resolution (DAY OF HONOR, S.J.RES.44 & H.J. RES.98) that was passed unanimously last year by the U.S. Congress. The US recognized that it "called upon all its citizens, including the most oppressed of its citizens to provide service and sacrifice to defeat Nazism and fascism" ...and..."because of invidious discrimination, many of the courageous military activities of these minorities were not reported and honored fully and appropriately until decades after the Allied Victory in World War II." And, in fact,

### Veteran Stand Downs



Homelessness is a serious problem in our country. People are seen living on the streets throughout our communities. Many of the homeless are veterans. And many more veterans run the risk of becoming homeless.

They deserve better and they need our help. Network 2 is committed to making a difference in these veteran's lives. Many veterans are simply unaware of the services that are available to them. That is why we hold "Stand Downs" throughout the Network.

Stand Downs offer homeless veterans access to VA health care professionals and other community service organizations which provide

the veteran with information and services including food, shelter and medical assistance.

Stand Down is a military term used when front line troops come in out of the field to regroup, re-supply and refresh. The concept of a stand down began in 1988 in San Diego when a group of Vietnam Veterans believed that the highly effective military model of a stand down could be used to provide a safe and supportive environment for homeless veterans. Stand Downs help draw the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless to places where they are welcomed by people committed to helping them. (see Stand Downs page 7)



## HAPPENINGS FROM AROUND THE NETWORK

### *Planetree Program - Canandaigua VA sited as "Best Practice"*

The Planetree philosophy is being established throughout Network 2's medical centers and outpatient clinics. Planetree encourages healing - body, mind and soul by getting the patient more actively involved in their health care. An educated patient can more actively participate in their care.

Angelica Thieriot founded Planetree in 1978. After several traumatic hospital experiences, she developed the Planetree philosophy. In 1985, the first Planetree unit opened in San Francisco, California. Today, there are more than 40 health care facilities throughout the world that practice Planetrees' philosophy of patient-focused care. Network 2 is the only Federal Government agency and largest health care provider in the world affiliated with Planetree.

Planetree is still a relatively new idea. It is a new way of thinking about how we care for patients and interact with their families.

Changes in our Network will take place over several years. Some changes will be in the patient and staff education process while others will be environmental and structural changes. Some changes will be so gradual you won't even notice them. Others will be quicker and the results more obvious. By utilizing many of our Network councils, the Planetree philosophy will become integrated into the way we provide care to our patients.

The Canandaigua VA is already well underway in their Planetree efforts. Already a "best practice" for the Network, Canandaigua has created a garden room on one of the wards and established an outdoor garden for patients and their families to enjoy. They have also received \$5,600 in donations for their Planetree efforts.

Planetree committees have been established throughout the Network. Committee leaders include: Albany - **Sue Burkart-Jayez**, Batavia - **Tom Bligh**, Bath - **Debbie Clickner**, Buffalo - **John Quagliano**, CBOCs - **Fran Peters**, Canandaigua - **Patricia Lind**, Syracuse - **Diane Cass**.

For more information about Planetree and its integration into Network 2, visit our website at <http://www.va.gov/visns/visn02/cslines/planetree.html> or contact Network 2 Planetree Program Coordinator, Neal Relyea, RN at (518) 626-5480 or Planetree's national website at [www.planetree.org](http://www.planetree.org).



*Canandaigua's new garden room.*

### **Stand Downs** (continued from page 6)

The Stand Downs have renewed the spirit and given many veterans the information and counseling needed to greatly improve their situations. This special program would not be as effective as it is without the support and tireless energy of our dedicated VA volunteers and staff.

### **VA Partners with the community in "Making Strides against Breast Cancer" Walk**

The Albany VA has participated for six consecutive years in "Making Strides against Breast Cancer" Walk. This was the first year the VA was a corporate sponsor for the event which was held on October 14. VA employees raised \$10,090. This was the 6th year the Albany VA participated in the Breast Cancer Walk.



**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

## *Employees Offered Buyout Guidance*

Network 2 employees can now apply for Voluntary Separation Incentive Payments (buyouts) through December 31, 2002. VA is authorized to offer buyouts to regular and early retirees, and those who resign from Federal Service. Consistent with the provisions of the previous buyout authority, overall staffing levels for the Department of Veterans Affairs cannot decline as a consequence of the buyout program. This authority is intended to facilitate VA's efforts to achieve a re-allocation of resources through the re-engineering of vacated positions in such a way that will achieve efficiencies and allow us to more effectively meet our patient care responsibilities. Buyouts may be approved for Title 5 and Title 38 employees, but only when it is determined that it's in the VA's best interest to do so.

Under the buyout authority, an employee is eligible to receive a voluntary separation incentive payment of up to \$25,000 (depending on employee's salary and number of years of Federal civilian employment) if he/she: is in a position approved by management as being eligible for a buyout and is serving under an appointment without time limit and has been continuously employed by VA for at least 3

years. Certain other restrictions may apply and interested employees are encouraged to contact the HR LINK\$ Shared Service Center at (800) 414-5272 for details.


Employees who are interested in retiring or resigning in order to receive a buyout should make their interest known to their Local Care Line Manager by completing a buyout request form. For your convenience, the request form is available for download from the human resources section of the Network 2 web page:

<http://vawww.visn2.med.va.gov/emp/hr/hrindex.html>



## *Health Benefits Announcement*

The effective date of federal employees health benefits open season elections will be January 13, 2002 not January 1, 2002 as previously indicated.



VA Healthcare Network  
Upstate New York  
Network 2 Communications  
465 Westfall Road  
Rochester, New York 14620

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\$300

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